



Mayor's Column  
November 21, 2013



### **Inspiring Stories Accompany Donations**

Working on Wreaths Across America's ceremony for Gallatin has been both a learning experience and an inspiration. Not only is our community giving donations, they are sharing their personal stories. And they are fascinating.

To quickly recap, Wreaths Across America is a non-profit event that happens simultaneously across the country at 10 a.m. on Saturday, December 14. The City of Gallatin has joined the Wreaths Across America family this year and will place wreaths on as many graves in the City Cemetery as donations allow. There are more than 600 veterans buried in the City Cemetery, some dating back to the Civil War.

Just this week, Allen Parks stopped by my office to make a donation in memory of his great uncles, WWI veterans George and Alfred Puryear, as well as Vietnam Veteran Don Templeton. Allen shared that George Puryear was the first U.S. Army Officer in WWI to escape a German prisoner of war camp. George was 23 at the time. George then flew around the U.S. promoting war bonds and was sadly killed in a plane crash. George Puryear, with this rich and interesting history, is buried in the City Cemetery.

Another family – Billy Green Glover, Bessie Green Short, and Mary Green Morgan – has made a donation in memory of Flight Officer William E. (Billy) Soper of Gallatin. Officer Soper was reported missing in action on February 22, 1944. He was on his 46<sup>th</sup> flight mission. He was later declared dead on October 8, 1945. His monument is also in the City Cemetery.

Joan and Jim Blanich have a great military history, too. Jim is a Vietnam veteran. He was a helicopter pilot with 500 missions and remained in the U.S. Marines until retirement in 1991. Joan and Jim have also made a donation in memory of Joan's mother and father. Her mother, Hazel Dukes Westover, was an Army nurse that followed Patton's army as they liberated France. Her father, Montgomery Westover, was in the Army/Air Corps. Jim's father and all of his uncles served during World War II. Milo Blanich was in the Navy. Louis and Steve Blanich were in the Army/Air Corps and flew dangerous missions over Germany. Uncle Russell Erickson was in the Army. They all survived. However, Uncle George Blanich was in the Pacific Theater where he perished in the war.

These are just a few of the veterans being memorialized or honored with donations to the City of Gallatin's Wreaths Across America. Other are honoring or memorializing parents, sisters, brothers, sons, daughters, friends and more with the donations they have made.

A \$15 donation secures one wreath. The wreaths are live and will be delivered by volunteers in early December. The City will hand out a program at the event on Dec. 14 listing all the names of the veterans being recognized for their service. Each and every one of them has a very unique story. It is a humbling experience to get to know these stories and the people who sharing them.

If you'd like to make a donation – the last day the City can accept them is Wednesday, November 27 by 4 p.m. Please make checks payable to "Wreaths Across America". Mail or drop off your donations to the Mayor's Office, City of Gallatin, 132 West Main Street, Gallatin, TN 37066. If you'd like more information, don't hesitate to call us a 452-5961.